



HOME & GARDEN

Home and Garden information center • 12005 Homewood Road • Ellicott City, MD 21042 • 1-800-342-2507

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Vegetable and Herb Gardening Tips

Culture

- Pinch the blooms off flower and vegetable transplants before you set them out. This will help direct the plants' energies to root development and will result in more productive plants. Gently breakup the roots of root-bound transplants.
- Begin setting out transplants of warm season crops like squash, peppers, eggplant and tomato. But be prepared to cover plants with a tarp or light blanket if frost is expected. Mix in a handful of either finely ground calcitic or hydrated lime with the planting soil of each pepper and tomato transplant to prevent blossom-end rot. Set up your tomato support system after transplanting. Very tall tomato transplants can be laid horizontally in a shallow trench with the growing tip gently bent into vertical position. Roots will grow all along the buried stem. Corn, beans and other tender crops can also be planted. Hold off on planting pumpkins until mid June so that coloring and harvest occur closer to Halloween. Be sure not to plant tender annual plants like basil and eggplant until after the last frost date. Parsley is slow to germinate and basil should not be directly sown in the garden until the soil has thoroughly warmed.
- For an extra boost, apply a liquid fertilizer to the foliage or root zone of newly set plants to get them quickly established.
- Did your garden get over taken by weeds last year? Take action now, before weeds become unmanageable. Consider the following options around plants and between rows: dried grass clippings, sections of newspaper covered with straw, black landscape fabric or black plastic mulch. The latter two will also warm the soil and hasten the harvesting of warm-season vegetables like melons, eggplant, tomatoes and peppers.
- Now that it is warming up, you'll begin to see slugs feeding on all types of vegetable plants. They feed at night and chew holes in leaves and can also shred leaf tissue with their rasping mouthparts. Slime trails are a definitive sign of slug activity. They breed in protected, damp areas under boards, in ground covers and under thick mulches. They can be trapped with shallow pans of water and bread yeast or beer. You can also set out boards or half grapefruit rinds to attract them to be collected and destroyed. Diatomaceous earth, sharp sand or ground crab and oyster shell can be applied around plants as physical barriers. A new product containing iron phosphate is available that is supposed to slowly poison slugs upon ingestion. This is product safe to use around food crops.
- Salad greens should be grown in rich soil and regularly watered and fertilized for optimum succulence and eating quality.
- Wondering about planting a few heirloom tomatoes this summers? The Home and Garden Information Center has tested and recommends the following varieties: Golden Queen, Prudens Purple, Brandywine, Georgia Streak, Cherokee Purple, German Johnson, Belgian Giant, Amish Paste, Pineapple, Tappy's Finest, Green Zebra, and Mortgage Lifter.

Insects

- Cucumber beetles are either yellow with 11 black dots or yellow with 3 black stripes. They have a wide host range and begin to feed on all plant parts of all members of the cucumber family as soon as they begin to grow in the garden. These pests spread bacterial wilt disease, primarily to cucumber and muskmelon, which causes plants to wilt and die in a short time. The beetles must be controlled with insecticides or excluded with floating row covers. "County Fair" is a hybrid cucumber cultivar that is resistant to bacterial wilt disease.

Educating People To Help Themselves

Local Governments - U.S. Department of Agriculture Cooperating

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- Cutworms are nocturnal caterpillars that feed on leaves and stems and can cut large plants off at ground level. They can be excluded with cardboard, plastic, or aluminum collars inserted into the soil around individual plants or apply a rough or gritty material, like ground up oyster shell or sharp sand, around vulnerable plants.
- Aphid numbers are high now on a wide variety of landscape and garden plants. It is usually not necessary to spray insecticides or release beneficials to control aphids. Populations of lady bird beetle, green lacewings and wasp parasites build up quickly to keep aphids in check. You'll see these predators and parasites at work if you observe the aphid colonies closely. Planting a wide variety of flowering plants that bloom throughout spring and summer will help attract and keep beneficial insects in your landscape. If necessary, an application of insecticidal soap or ultra fine horticultural oil will kill these soft bodied pests. Avoid pesticides if beneficial insects are present.
- Squash vine borer adult females are large, clearwing moths with orange/black bodies. They begin flying mid-late May in Central Maryland and lay eggs on squash stems, especially zucchini. Use floating row covers to exclude the adult females.
- Seed corn maggot feeds on corn and bean seed and young vegetable plants. To avoid seed corn maggot and bird damage, try pre-sprouting bean and corn seed.
- Floating row covers are made from a spun-bonded polypropylene material and are available from mail-order seed and garden supply companies. They are effective at excluding insect pests and promoting strong early growth. Protect broccoli, cauliflower and cabbage plants from the imported cabbageworm with floating row covers. The adult is a small white butterfly with brown spots on the wings. The small velvety larvae that emerge from eggs laid on your plants can be controlled with a spray of *Bacillus thuringiensis*, also known as B.t. This organic, microbial insecticide acts as a stomach poison on young larvae.
- Rabbits and groundhogs can be a serious threat to flower and vegetable gardens, feeding on young and tender plants. They can be excluded with a low, 2 ft. high fence that is secured to the ground. Groundhogs will climb, an additional strand of electric fence wire at the top will keep them off. You can also repel them with commercial repellents, blood meal, or by sprinkling hot pepper flakes around plants.
- Weeds in asparagus and rhubarb beds can be very difficult to control. It is always best to hand pull weeds or cut them off cleanly at the soil line with a small, sharp hoe. Be careful not to cut into crowns or emerging spears. Asparagus beds that are 3-4 years old should not be harvested for more than 2 weeks. In some established beds, spears may come up weak and thin. This could be due to many factors including: over-crowding, insufficient fertility, weed competition, fusarium crown rot, cutting for too long a period the previous spring or cutting ferns down in summer rather than allowing them to grow through the first frost in fall. Asparagus beetle adults feed on spears causing scarring and the females lay small black eggs resembling specks of soil.

Herbs

- Four-lined plant bugs are now feeding on a wide range of woody and herbaceous plants, especially mint. The adults are yellowish-green with 4 black stripes. The nymphs are bright red. The bugs leave rows of small, round dark spots on leaves. Unless severely injured early in the season, plants will outgrow moderate feeding damage.